

Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee
February 24, 2022

Public Hearing on:
House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
(DSS)

Good evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Tyanet Allen from Bridgeport Connecticut, I am the Vice President of Residential Services at Marrakech and have been working there for the past 24 years. I actually was a student of Marrakech's Academy for Human Service Training 25 years ago and hired to an entry level position upon my completion of this program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget.

I oversee 23 group homes that support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for community nonprofits that you fought to include in last year's budget. I'm here tonight to ask you to honor the long term plan to address underfunding of community nonprofits and increase funding this year by an additional \$461 million, or 8% in total for FY23.

This funding is needed now more than ever.

Since COVID we lost a lot of our workforce and we are operating with our largest position vacancy rate ever, 23%. Even with the increase in wages, there are less stressful jobs, and less risky jobs, that pay more. It is hard to grant time off for our hard working employees just because of all of these vacancies. Human services are now in competition with companies like Amazon and Walmart that require no specialized training, are paying more and offering more hiring incentives.

Last year's increase in funding for our DDS programs was used as directed by the Group Home Settlement and provided significant funding to increase the minimum wage for direct support staff.

The group home settlement also created significant challenges:

- First, the terms of the settlement provided wage increases of as much as 11.6% for entry level staff, which next year will increase to 14.5%. But the agreement only provides a 3% increase to everyone else. Although 45% of our 700 employees have been working here 7 years or more, most of them are earning the same rate of pay as new hires due to this. The wage compression for our employees with seniority and our next level management positions is discouraging.
- The ICF/ID homes that I manage were mandated to provide the same increases that the group home settlement demanded yet our rate increase granted was 4.5%. This fiscal year's loss due to the fact that DSS did not financially honor the minimum wage increase, is putting our ICF/ID programs in financial jeopardy.

In my 24 years here, I have never been so worried about staffing our programs 24/7 coming out of COVID. We take pride in offering high quality services to individuals and families and unfortunately I am meeting referrals, who are on the emergency list, for our homes and we are unable to take them

immediately because we cannot hire and train people fast enough to meet their individual needs in our programs. I feel bad for the individuals and their families, we have always been able to accept referrals in a timely fashion and unfortunately we are unable to at this time.

Our employees, our greatest resource, are tired and wearing thin.

Please show that Connecticut values people with disabilities and with similar service needs, and values our essential employees, most of whom are black and brown.

Please grant the 8% COLA for human service nonprofit organizations.

Thank you for your time.

Tyanet Allen